IronWatch

Issue
19

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ABYSSAL TIDINGS

A Message from the Editor

Welcome back to another thrilling issue of the IRONWATCH magazine! Dreadball Extreme's Kickstarter is just starting out, and has already tripled their goal, as of this issue's release and if the original Dreadball Kickstarter is any indication, more goodies and stretch goals are sure to follow.

I'd like to take this time to put out a special request for those of you out there with Kings of War articles, be they battle reports, special rules and missions, stories, and/or modeling or painting tutorials: Send them in! We'd love to make sure that Kings of War gets all of the love and recognition it deserves, but the only way we can do that is with your loving submissions. Email them to us at either winslows010@yahoo.com or PM me on the Mantic Forums!

As always, whether you're a new reader, or have been with us since Issue 1, thanks for reading, and Welcome to the Watch!

-Austin

Cover art by Boris Samec
Title art by Mark Smith

Please note that, while we here at **Ironwatch** *attempt to deliver you the best products and ideas we can, we cannot guarantee the balance of any scenarios or special rules presented herein. If you find any errors, grammar mistakes, or rule imbalances, please contact us on the Mantic Forums (Look for the discussion labeled "Ironwatch Issue X Feedback") and let us know what we could do to improve your fan-produced magazine. If you are interested in writing, illustrating, or editing for our magazine, please let us know on the feedback discussion as well so you can get in on the action!*

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

IRONWATCH

Iron Forge 4
See the amazing array of top-tier paintjobs from our team of professional-quality painters.

Dreadball Extreme 12
Learn about the new Dreadball Extreme Kickstarter and see some sneak peeks of the Models available and yet to come.

The Mantic Calendar 15
Learn what Mantic-related events and tournaments are upcoming in your area!

Q&A with James Hewitt 18
James Hewitt answers questions from the Mantic fans about Deadzone, Kings of War, and the future of Mantic.

KINGS OF WAR

Escalating Conflicts, by “Arcaneshield” 22
See some awesome units and rules you can use in your own Kings of War armies

WARPATH

The Ledger, Part 3, C. A. “Owesome” Monteath-Carr 24
The adventure continues as we see the story behind how the Orx, led by Commander Hockslock, landed in the Deadzone

Painting the Plague Faction in a few Simple Steps, by Matt Gilbert 37
See how to easily paint your Plague up to a high standard for use in your Deadzone and Warpath games

357, by John Hoyland 44
We enter the world of the mysterious Agent 357 and learn of how the Corporation deals With espionage and intrigue.

The Iron Forge

Welcome back to the Iron Forge!

This week we have:

- Christian Schlumpberger, with a fantastic Plague Generation 1
- Ian Powell, with a Buzz Lightyear Enforcer Captain!
- Matt Gilbert, also a gory Plague Generation 1 as well as a painting article later in the magazine
- Steicy Jourdan, with a ghoulish Plague Generation 3
- Vincent Pascaud with a vibrant Mawbeast Bomber

Be sure to check in next issue for more superb paintjobs!

By Claudia Zuminich

By Paul Scott

Christian Schlumpberger

Christian Schlumpberger

IAN POWELL

IAN POWELL

Matt Gilbert

Be sure to check out Matt's article on how to paint your Plague models up to tabletop standards too!

Steicy Jourdan

VINCENT PASCAUD

DREADBALL EXTREME

Mantic return to Kickstarter with the follow-up to the very successful DreadBall – The Futuristic Sports Game: **DreadBall Xtreme.**

Taking the glitz and glamour underground, **DreadBall Xtreme** is a darker, more violent version of the Galaxy's Greatest Sport, played between two coaches on a rubber-backed, high quality deluxe pitch.

There are a number of expansions for the game, such as the Player Manual, which includes stats and rules for four new sponsors and all 12 existing teams, four new

Dreadball Extreme

Sponsor models and the Customizable pitch, which can be built in a number of suggested layouts or one of your own unique designs.

With no referee there are no fouls, encouraging players to actively seek out the opposition with brutal slams and devastating stomps, whilst Sponsors bet, threaten and blackmail the way to victory. There are concealed traps, hidden inside hard plastic warehouse scenery scattered across the pitch, and moveable Strike posts that will change the tactics you need to achieve victory.

DREADBALL EXTREME

The 24-day DreadBall Xtreme campaign launched on Friday 21st February at 1:30 GMT raising its $100,000 goal in 38 minutes. It promises new teams, new MVPs and new ways of playing before closing 11:59pm Sunday 16th March. Figures are multi-part plastic and come pre-assembled.

You can find out more about the Xtreme Kickstarter here.▪

Mantic Calendar

The Mantic Calendar is an exciting new regular article in the Ironwatch magazine! Keep an eye out for it in future issues to find out where Mantic game events are near you!

If you have Mantic-related events or tournaments you'd like to add, please PM Matt Gilbert or Austin Peasley on the forums, or email us at

winslows010@yahoo.com

February

2nd—Vapnartak (Including KoW regional tournament an DB super-league tournaments), at the York Race Course, UK

8th—RAGE, at the Royal Armouries, in Leeds, UK

15th—DEADZONE RETAIL LAUNCH WEEKEND!

Wargames Workshop Dreadball tournament, in Milton Keynes, UK

Mini-Mantic Day, Major Arcana in Dundee, UK

16th—Battlecry KoW tournament, in Auckland, NZ

22nd—Sabrecon, in Leicester, NZ

Iceni Wargames, in Norwich, UK

23rd—Total Wargamer KoW tournament, in Evesham, UK

28th—OH-Con, in Toledo, Ohio, USA. Goes until March 2nd. Kings of War 1000 pt Tournament on February 28th from 4-8:30 PM, and Dreadball Tournament on February 28th from 8:30 AM to 12:00 PM

March

1st—Hammerhead, at the Newark Showground, Newark-on-Trent, UK

By "Dusty"

Mantic Calendar

South Scotland Dreadball Regional Final, at Game Hub in Edinburgh

8th—Dreadball tournament, in Luton, UK. Address is St Christopher's church hall, 10 Stockingstone Road, Luton, LU2 7NB

15th—War & Peace Games Club Launch Party, in Nottingham, UK

Kings of War Tournament, in Dayton, Ohio, USA. Address is The Hobby Shop, 153 N. Springboro Pike, Dayton OH, USA

21st—CincyCon, in Cincinnati, Ohio, USA. Goes until March 23rd. Dreadball on the 21st, Kings of War on the 23rd.

22nd—A Call to Muster, in Middlesborough, UK

Megalofunotron—Dreadball tournament, at Vanguard Wargaming in Bristol, UK

29th—Shiltron, in Glasgow, UK

Headingly Games Club Open Day. Address is HEART, Bennett Road, Headingley, Leeds, LS6 3HN

April

3rd—Adepticon. Goes until the 6th. Address is The Westin Lombard Yorktown Center, 70 Yorktown Center, Lombard, IL 60148, United States

12th—Salute, at ExCeL London, in London, UK

26th—Clash of Kings Regional Tournament, at Firestorm Games, Cardiff, UK

Mantic Calendar

May

4th—Diceni. Address is The Forum Trust, Millennium Plain, Bethel Street, Norwich NR2 1TF

10th—Carronade, in Scotland, UK

Stockport (NWGC) - KoW regional tournament, at Marauder Games, UK

30th—UK Expo, in Birmingham, UK

By "left64"

Q&A WITH JAMES HEWITT

(Organized by Matt Gilbert)

The Mantic Q&A feature contains questions from the community via the forum, answered by James Hewitt, Community Manager at Mantic Games. If anyone wants to ask a question they can do so here: http://forum.manticblog.com/showthread.php?6876-Mantic-Q-and-A-for-Ironwatch

By Andy Beckett

Warpath/Deadzone

When will Warpath get vehicles? Will future Warpath vehicles have sufficient size to reasonably represent supposed transport capacity?

Warpath is due for a relaunch, and will almost certainly get vehicles when this happens. We're not entirely sure when, mind! One of the big things with the Deadzone terrain was that it showed us we can do large-scale hard plastic, so that leads into vehicles quite happily. As for sizes… well, that's something that will happen during the design process, which is still some way off!

What size of game (measured in squads or models) will Warpath cater for when the next version comes out? To what extent will the anticipated game size scale up or down?

Nothing's certain yet, but with Deadzone catering to skirmishes, Warpath will most likely aim for the Kings of War style "big battle".

Do we have a date or time-frame for the release of the Tales of Nexus Psi short story collection?

Yes! March J

Is James leaving all due to looking for a reason to get out of painting his Deadzone Marauders (no excuses now, the unruly masses want to see pics)?

I'll have you know I got them based and undercoated the other day.

Kings of War

Are there any plans for remaking the KoW Twilight Kin and Abyssal Dwarves models so that they have their own unique style

Q&A WITH JAMES HEWITT

rather than just being their "good" counterparts with metal add-ons?

It's on the big list of "stuff we want to do", but it all comes down to where it fits in the priorities. Would we rather bring out models for things that don't have models yet, or re-do existing models to make them better? It's a balancing act, but with the talk of another Kings of War Kickstarter, I think it's a definite possibility.

Can you tell us anything more about future plans for the Nature army? Will it be part of this summer's Kickstarter?

I'm afraid I don't know anything about them, and the plans for the next KoW Kickstarter are at the moment very, very vague. It will definitely be something we'll look at!

By Daniel King

For the next KOW KS can we have "other" undead like zombie/skeleton ogres, dwarves or orcs as well as big monsters and warmachines for all and sundry?

A range of Undead is a very cool idea – I'll pass it along! As for big monsters and war machines… well, let's round out the troops and whatever else we've got first, and see where we end up J

Will we see Campaign modules for Kings of War in the future?

Interesting question! I think you're going to like our upcoming Kings of War releases…

Can we get some hobgoblins.....and maybe a whole army list for them some time?

I think they'd make a great addition to the KoW range – again, I'll pass it along to the studio!

Will we see a "Bear Wizard" mini released for KoW?

That's out of my hands, but I suspect it might happen if there's enough pressure… ;)

General

Why do you use bevelled edge bases for models like the Enforcer Captain instead of straight edge bases to match with the normal infantry? Any plans to make these

Q&A WITH JAMES HEWITT

By "ManticFanBoyLAD"

consistent?

Good question – most likely because those were the bases that were available when we were looking at which bases to use! When we get around to a big Warpath project it's something we might be able to look at.

What is the advantage for using integral bases on Mantic figures and are there any plans to change this? Pegs instead would be more flexible for model design (from your point of view) and for people using other bases (e.g. resin ones).

They make it really quick to rank up loads of models (especially if you're doing unit basing) and they give a nice big contact point for gluing purposes. They were an idea from the very start of Mantic that also makes them stand out from everything else out there! We're always flexible, though, so if enough people say they want us to change, it's something we might consider.

James - Any funny anecdotes or stories you'd like to share from your time working at Mantic?

Loads!

Are there any plans for large-scale (6-10mm) Warpath/KoW for really big units/ games?

Oh, wait, you probably wanted a better answer for the previous question, didn't you? Okay then! I've got loads of anecdotes, but the Mantic trip to SPIEL Essen (in Germany) last October was one long hilarious story. There were three of us – myself, Josh and Andy from the trade team – crammed into the front of a tiny van. We were planning to arrive on the Wednesday morning and get set up straight away before crashing out at the hotel, but we got an earlier ferry than expected and ended up arriving around 10pm. Easy, we though; just check in at a hotel and get a good night's sleep!

Unfortunately, as well as SPIEL, there was another big show and a huge football game on the next day, so there was no space. In

Q&A WITH JAMES HEWITT

any hotel. Anywhere in Essen. Or in the surrounding towns. We drove around for four hours, running down the satnav's "nearest hotel" list, and being laughed out of foyer after foyer by a succession of hotel staff who clearly thought we were the least organised people ever.

Eventually we ended up parking in a petrol station forecourt from 4am, taking turns to get half an hour's sleep in the van while the other two sat inside drinking coffee. Eventually dawn broke and we made our way to the convention hall, where we discovered that due to a metric / imperial mixup, our stand was approximately the size of the average broom cupboard. And that was just the beginning! It was an awesome time, despite the mildly terrifying hotel and the fact that the ferry home was during a massive storm, and I can't wait to go again next year!

As for your other question – nothing planned as yet. We've got plenty else to be getting on with in 28mm scale without jumping to another one!

Did James ever actually beat Warren from BoW in a game off camera?

Plenty of times! He regularly stays over at my place when he comes to Nottingham, so we tend to get a few games in during the evenings, and I've beaten him at a few. I've even beaten him on camera a couple of times. I never remember who wins, though, because that's such a tiny part of the experience; what I remember is how much fun we have when we're gaming! We're both very similar gamers, with a similar approach, and I think it really shows on camera. Warren also makes *awesome* Enforcer Jump Pack noises.▪

By Marcel Popik

Escalating Conflict

Additional units for Kings of War armies

By "Arcaneshield"

Corpse Chariot: This rickety contraption is slower than an unburdened horse, and only offers meager protection for the necromancer aboard. Its strength lies in the corpses piled upon it, which aid the necromancer in focusing their dark energies.

Spectral Throne: Reserved for only the most prestigious Lich Kings and Vampire Lords, this magnificent throne is held aloft by spectral wraith knights sworn to protect their charge. Some of the more hedonistic vampires have been known to bring their entire harem on board, for while it is ostensibly a weapon of warfare, the throne itself is luxuriously comfortable. It also serves to empower the necromantic energies of those it carries.

Entries:

Necromancer on Corpse Chariot
Hero

Unit Size	Sp	Me	Ra	De	At	Ne	Pts
1	7	5+	-	4+	1	12/14	150

Special: Dark Surge(8), Elite (Heal, Zap, and Dark Surge only), Heal(3), Zap(3).

By Boris Samec

Lich King on Spectral Throne
Hero

Unit Size	Sp	Me	Ra	De	At	Ne	Pts
1	8	4+	-	5+	5	-/18	260

Special: Crushing Strength 2, Dark Surge (10), Elite (Heal, Zap, and Dark Surge only), Fly, Heal(5), Shambling, Zap(5).

By Guiseppe Aquino

Vampire Lord on Spectral Throne
Hero

Unit Size	Sp	Me	Ra	De	At	Ne	Pts
1	8	3+	-	6+	12	-/18	300

Special: Crushing Strength(2), Dark Surge(3), Elite (Heal, Zap, and Dark Surge only), Fly, Heal(3), Inspiring, Shambling, Zap(3).

By "left64"

By Malcolm Blackwell

The Ledger Part 3

By C. A. "Owesome" Monteath-Carr

Commander Hockslock wasn't a gambling man, but if he was, he would've bet 5000 credits that the lonely-looking salaryman at the bar wouldn't live through the night.

"I bet you 5000 credits," his friend Grushnak, said, "that the lonely-looking salaryman at the bar won't live through the night."

"Done!" Hockslock exclaimed, draining his pint and slamming the glass back on the table.

It was a quiet night in the Missing Sorak pub. Of course, for a bar frequented by mercenaries and thieves, a quiet night only meant that the stabbings, pick-pocketing, and occasional punch-up occurred infrequently rather than constantly. While Corporation office workers did visit this side of town from time to time, they usually came in large entourages flanked by teraton bodyguards so they could experience the thrill of slumming it without risk of contracting a nasty case of being stabbed in the face.

No, the young man at the bar clearly had problems. His first problem was wearing a very nice suit in a very rough part of town. This told Commander Hockslock that he was rich. His second problem was that he was drinking Judwan whiskey. This told Commander Hockslock that he was desperate – Judwan whiskey was famous for being simultaneously very alcoholic and not terribly good, and was generally drunk by those in a hurry to fall down unconscious in

a puddle of their own crud.

By Grant Mahoney

As it happened, Hockslock was an excellent problem-solver. Granted, the problems he solved fell into a very specific area of expertise – namely, if the problem could be solved with copious amounts of violence and small arms fire, then Commander Hockslock was the action-oriented, goal-focused, force application specialist you wanted to call on. More problems in the world of Corporation high finance were solved that way than one might expect from reading the financial pages.

"I think," Hockslock said to Grushnak, "That I will ask our young friend to unburden himself of his troubles, yes?"

Grushnak frowned. Nobody frowned like an Orx, Hockslock thought. We have very expressive foreheads.

"That's cheating," Grushnak said. "You help him out, you forfeit the bet."

Hockslock grinned, revealing his perfectly polished and capped teeth. Image was important in his line of work, and if one wanted to make an impression on a client and secure repeat business, one should always consider presentation.

"New bet," he offered to his lieutenant. "I bet you *ten* thousand credits that I can get a job out of him."

"A job? From *him*?" Grushnak snorted.

At the bar, the young man was talking to a tall Nameless One in fishnet tights. She had rouged face-tentacles, and body-glitter all over her exposed shoulders.

"You're on," Grushnak said, spitting into his palm and holding out his hand. Hockslock grinned even wider, did the same and shook his hand.

Hockslock pushed his chair away from the table and walked over to the man. He caught the end of the conversation as he approached the bar.

"…with a melon," the girl said, wiggling her tentacles suggestively.

"Tandy," Hockslock said, "I know you're just trying to cheer the boy up." Tandy pouted.

"How about I buy you a drink, and you leave us to talk for a minute?"

She raised an eyebrow. "I'll have a mimosa. With a cherry." Hockslock slid over his card and nodded at the bartender. "And a little umbrella on a stick," Tandy continued.

When the bartender gave her the drink, Tandy made a little shimmy as she blew a kiss to the kid over her left shoulder. Hockslock rolled his eyes as the boy blushed.

"So," Hockslock said, draping a heavy, comradely arm over the trader's shoulders. With his other hand he gestured to the bartender for more drinks. Schloe, a sphyr who worked the graveyard shift and had seen Hockslock do this dance many times, rolled his eyes and made to pour two handles of Hockslock's favorite ale. "You, sir, look like a man with problems."

The businessman must have been no older than 25, if Hockslock was any judge. He had the olive complexion common to many humans in this corner of the Galactic Co-Prosperity Sphere, and his eyes were red and puffy from recent weeping. Hockslock took note of his fashionable, no-nonsense haircut, and his expensive retro-chrono – a recent craze that he'd read about in the *Entrepreneur* holo-mag among young executives, where they would pay top dollar for inaccurate, gear-and-spring-driven timepieces in lieu of a regular chrono, counting on their iLens to keep them connected to the planetary datasphere. Hockslock pegged him as a hungry young pup, trying to muscle his way into the mawbeast pack that was interplanetary

By Marcel Popik

finance.

As an entrepreneur himself, Hockslock found it prudent to keep abreast of the latest trends and fashions in the executive class. Market research. He found it helped him make the right pitch in situations like these.

“Problems?” the human asked, sneering. “Oh, I got problems. Problems you couldn’t even imagine.”

The man turned his bar stool to face Hockslock, blindly groping for a drink. Schloe put down a tankard within his reach, and the man nearly knocked it over.

“Can you imagine a trillion credits? A hundred trillion?” he continued. Hockslock nodded. He imagined that much money in his sleep, every night. “Can you imagine me, sitting on a deal that would make that much money and more… vanishing, overnight. Poof!”

The man waved his free hand in the air dismissively while pausing to take a sip of the beer. “Of course you can’t. You’re an Orx. A brute. Whereas *I* am – or was – a financial genius, holding the future of worlds in my hand.”

Oh goody, Hockslock thought. *A racist.* Hockslock took pride in his work, but he really enjoyed it when his marks turned out to be bigots as well as stupid and desperate.

“You tell me, yes?” he said, slipping into what he thought of as his ‘me dumb Orx’ dialect. “Sometimes it helps to talk.”

“I work in resource futures,” the man said. “I’m good at it. I’m *great* at it. The trick is to jump in when the time is right – when a new colony gets established the colonizing company is looking to secure their future output, right? Make sure that they’ll get steady revenue for their raw materials, whether that’s mining products, exotic agriculture, rare drugs, whatever – whatever drew them to go through all the expense of setting up a risky venture like a new colony, the management doesn’t care about anything except return on investment - which is where guys like me come in.

By Pete Kijek

By "Daedle

"Guaranteed revenue stream. No sweeter words in the Corporate lexicon. A broker like me takes a look at the mineral surveys, then steals the colonist's *actual* mineral surveys, and then sends spies to do *our own* mineral surveys, and based on that we bid and trade on the expected future production of that colony. If you're clever you can get the contract for cheaper than it's worth, then fling it off to a different, more gullible trader for a lot more than it's worth. These contracts can change hands a thousand times before some dumb settler even picks up a pickaxe."

Hockslock nodded, keeping his face the picture of wide-eyed rapt attention. He knew all this already – he and his boys had stolen, destroyed, or extorted the reports the executive was talking about in more backwater worlds than he cared to remember. But the guy liked to hear himself talk, so Hockslock let him.

"So when a new planet in the Delta Phi Eta system is looking for a buyer," the man continued, "and their survey report comes in as under-reporting the true value of their uranium and helium-3 stockpiles, I snap it up, manage to secretly leak the real reports, and set off a bidding frenzy the likes you've never seen. 100 trillion credits. The largest trade of my career. The bosses are talking about junior partnership in the firm. Then, an hour before the deal is meant to close…"

"…the planet disappears," Hockslock added.

"…the planet disappears," the man finished, drunkenly ignoring him. "Just gone, vanished from the face of the datasphere. Nothing in Wikipodia, nothing in the news, nothing in the star charts – and a lot of very important, very powerful people looking very stupid and looking for someone to blame."

Hockslock felt his heart start racing, but kept his expression fixed into paternalistic concern. "They leave you holding the baggies, yes? Dangling by the short and curled?"

The human nodded, moaned, and sunk his head back into the bar.

A containment protocol, the Orx thought. *A fresh one, and rich too, if this idiot is telling the truth.*

"My friend," he said to his crying companion, "I believe I can help, yes?"

"What can you do?" was the muffled response, the futures trader said, keeping his head on his arms.

"Allow me to introduce myself." Hockslock brought himself to his full height and thrust out his impressive jaw. "I am famed gentleman adventurer, Commander Hockslock."

This got the trader's attention. He sat bolt upright and stared.

"Commander Hockslock?" he managed. "I read your blog!"

***

That had been a week ago. The trader had kept the co-ordinates to the planet on a piece of paper he kept tucked into the casing of his watch – a good luck charm of sorts, until the deal was put through. The *Sweet Muhurghah*, Hockslock's custom FTL cruiser, was able to get to the planet in a day's time. With some deft flying they had managed to sneak past the Enforcer blockade – although, to be fair to the Enforcers, keeping a tight lock-down of millions of kilometers of open space was trickier than you might think – and for the last few days Hockslock and his

By Grant Mahoney

team had been picking through the rubble of the colony on the way to the brokerage where the details of the deal were being kept.

Of course, they would've been remiss if they hadn't taken the opportunity to loot – sorry, to repurpose and recycle – some of the discarded riches of the colony. No self-respecting gentleman adventurer could possibly let defenseless credits fend for themselves in a disaster area.

His crew had been inside Containment Protocols before – the first time they had been trapped when the cordon first went up, and it had been a mad scramble to escape the planet. The second time had ostensibly been a rescue mission, and had made good material for the *Hockslock's Heroes* blog.

He was, as far as Hockslock was aware, the

only Orx mercenary to keep a public record – albeit one heavily embellished – of their adventures. He found it satisfying, and the revenue from selling the collected ebooks formed a small but steady stream of income for the band. It helped with finding jobs, too – pretty much anyone who moved in the nebulous world of high finance where a force application specialist such as himself might be required from time to time had at least heard *of* him.

Hell, there was even *Hockslock's Heroes* fan-fiction, which was… weird and often anatomically impossible.

Their looting had come out pretty well. While much of the Co-Prosperity Sphere's wealth was channeled through secure, encrypted data transfers there was always a need for hard currency – bearer bonds, precious metals or jewelry, even digital encryption keys for accounts were used as stores of value in frontier worlds like this even as the financial sector traded on the hypothetical future worth of the planet before it was ever generated.

Odds were good that their client was already dead, if he was willing to spill his guts to a stranger in a bar, which was why Hockslock had insisted on half the fee up front. There would be plenty of bidders for certified proof of the contracts lodged there, even if only to keep the existence of Delta Phi Eta secret. The thought of selling the data back to the Council of Seven was amusing, provided Hockslock could work out a way to do that that wouldn't get him killed.

His group was a mix of old friends and new hires: Grushnak had brought his "Mauler"-class assault Ripper Suit, and he'd tapped a buddy of his, Btoomba, to run another Ripper Suit festooned with guns, rocket launchers, and a pair of fuzzy dice dangling around his neck. Rudy, the sniper, was

By Matt Gilbert

scouting ahead, and Hurlukka, the smelly *barrumba,* was lugging around an ancient flamethrower. Eight hired guns rounded out the team, a mixture of fresh blood and veterans, brought on to make up the numbers for this job.

According to the map they'd managed to download off of a busted public information kiosk, there was a bank about a block away. For the workers of the planet it would be a fixture in their life, not only depositing or withdrawing their meager earnings but using it to register contracts they'd made amongst themselves – the banks offered a secure co-location service and mediation for disputes when it came to local contracts between colonists, a kind of small-scale version of the big off-world arbitration services like the one they were here to plunder. For the kind of things they were here for, these banks were a veritable gold-mine.

By Marcel Popik

"This is Shrike 1 to Command, come in Command," the earnest voice that crackled through Hockslock's ear piece belonged to Rudy, one of his snipers. He had been sent ahead to recon the bank.

"Go ahead, Rudy," Hockslock waved the rest of the gang to a stop, and he and his men moved to cover in the nearby empty storefronts.

"Command," Rudy continued, desperately trying to ignore the informality, "Tin men have set up base in target location. I count 7, confirmed one man-portable missile launcher present."

"Nice work, Rudy. Find a vantage point up behind them and wait for us."

"*Commander,*" Rudy stressed, almost whining now. "Shrike 1 requests operational security on this channel."

"It's an encrypted line, you dork," Hockslock shot back. "And even if they break the encryption, all they'll get is a dummy automated public broadcast of *Everybody Loves Ra'zlock*. Relax."

"I'll relax when we're rich and a parsec away. Stand by for surveillance photo. Shrike 1 out."

By Pete Kijek

Hockslock unclipped his tacslab and gestured for the team to fall into the abandoned Yn'dij bodega he'd sheltered in. The air was rancid with spoiled ingredients barely masked by the exotic spices the furry creatures used to season their food, but the padded furniture was unusually luxurious. Grushnak and Btoomba, unable to easily take off their Ripper suits, crouched down next to the window booth the rest of the gang crowded around.

When everyone was ready Hockslock tapped the screen with a stylus, activating the holographic display Rudy had sent them.

"The Enforcers are holed up here, in this fortified bank, with hopefully vast amounts of money that's just sitting there looking for a good home. Anyone notice anything odd about it?"

Grushnak spoke up. "It's a colossal waste of time and we should skip it and head straight to the payday?"

"No," Hockslock said. Grushnak had been grousing the whole mission. Hockslock didn't care if it was over the bet or if Grushnak was worried about catching the Plague, it was bad for morale. "It's right in our path and we can't avoid it for one reason. Anyone else?"

"It overlooks the plaza, sir," Gweeny, one of the young pups said, earnestly. "Uninterrupted fire lanes on every approach."

"Exactly. If we wanted to skirt around it, we're looking at a four or five hour detour to not get blown to bits." Hockslock scratched the side of his nose with the stylus.

"I say we knock on the front door," Btoomba said, hefting his autocannon. "If you've got to say it, say it with bullets."

"That's... just dumb enough to work," Grushnak cut in. "If we send Rudy and Hurlukka around the back with the flamethrower while Btoomba's making himself a target..."

Hockslock nodded. "All right, Heroes, here's what we do..."

***

By "Daedle"

Of course, it didn't go quite according to plan.

Btoomba was a champ, of course – playing the role of a trigger-happy muscle-head perfectly – of course the fact that he was a trigger-happy muscle-head helped immensely – and his hail of fire was enough to keep the Enforcers in the bank pinned.

He'd counted on Hurlukka not making it, but it was a calculated risk – if he'd managed to somehow get inside and spread some fire around, great, but as it was he had to make a show of trying to sneak around the back. But not *too* sneaky – all the better to seem stupider than he was, and frankly, no-one was going to mind getting his extra share of the spoils.

"Shrike One to Command," Rudy's voice said faintly in Hockslock's ear, "I'm hit, Command, please advise."

"How bad, Rudy?" Rudy being hit was not part of the plan, though. He had one of the few guns they had capable of piercing the Enforcer's armor, and losing him would be costly.

"Lot of blood, Sir," Rudy managed through gritted teeth. "Head wound. Can't tell if it's a graze, or-"

"Stay down, soldier," Hockslock said. "Grushnak and the boys should be flanking their position, should take the heat off of you."

"Affirmative. Shrike One out."

Hockslock glanced at his tac-slab. The transponder on Grushnak's Ripper Suit showed that they were in position. Time to feint.

"We know you are in the money-house, shiny humans!" Hockslock yelled out as Btoomba cut the barrage. "We like moneys! You give us moneys, you live, yes? Easy-peasy!

"Laying it on a bit thick, huh, boss?" Btoomba muttered over the comms. Hockslock waved his hand dismissively in his

direction.

“How do we know you'll let us live, Orx?” the Enforcers replied, using a built-in loudhailer. The enemy leader sounded calm, almost as if having a metric crudload of shells fired at him was as annoying as a light drizzle. Bravado, or confidence? Probably the latter.

“You wound me, shiny person! Commander Hockslock is famous for his trustworthiness!” He paused, hoping that his reputation had preceded him. There was no reply.

“Thirty minutes, shiny humans, then we come and take the moneys!”

Grushnak's icon was flashing on the tac-slab, signaling readiness. At his signal, Grushnak's team would detonate the demolition charges on the wall, and Grushnak and five Commandos would storm the building at the same time as Hockslock's squad. Hopefully the Enforcers wouldn't be able to bring their missile launcher to bear in close quarters, and Grushnak's close-quarter weaponry would be more than a match for the Enforcer's armor. Not the most elegant plan, but needs must when the mawbeast bites…

Btoomba signaled 'ready'. Rudy was still non-responsive, which meant that the two on the roof were free to return fire. Damn it, the frontal assault squad would have to stay back and -

“Okay, Orx!” the Enforcer leader yelled back. “We'll take the deal. My Corporal here says you're a man of your word, and you wouldn't want to disappoint a fan now, would you?”

“Are you sure?” Hockslock was stunned. He honestly hadn't even considered that they'd take the deal. He started rambling, trying to buy time. “We can, you know, shoot it out, you could escape dramatically, swear eternal vengeance on each other...”

“That's OK, we're not really interested in this bank anyway. You can take the cash, whatever. None of our frajing business.”

This smelled like a trick. And yet…

“If your corporal is a fan,” he said, “they would know I have not the sense of humor, yes? About these things? If this is a trick-”

By Grant Mahoney

"No, really. Look, we're coming out the front now."

Damn and blast.

The front door opened, and one of the Enforcers stepped out. His charge glove was powered down, and he dangled his pistol from his trigger finger.

Hockslock opened a channel to Grushnak. "Send the boys in the back door. Make sure they all leave, but stay out of sight. I don't trust this for a second."

He cut the channel before Grushnak could reply. No answer from Rudy, dammit.

Two more Enforcer soldiers came out of the bank, holding their weapons in as non-threatening a way as they could manage. The two from the roof even used their jump jets to give up the high ground and land on the sidewalk.

"See, Orx?" said the one with the charge glove. "Nothing to laugh about."

"I am so glad to see you are a man of honor," Hockslock called back, clipping his tac-slab to his belt and fingering his gun. His earpiece crackled to life.

"Boss, Tarkug here." Tarkug was one of the new hires for this job. Dependable. Cleaned his nails with a hrunka knife. "Bank's empty. There's just a whole pile of silver bullion here, unstamped. Even got a duffel bag on the top, half-filled, like someone abandoned it."

Hockslock felt the gnawing fear in his belly shoot through his body. "DON'T TOUCH THAT B-"

The rear of the bank exploded in a ball of fire. The Enforcers, expecting this, broke into a sprint for cover. Btoomba opened up with everything he had, autocannons and rockets chasing after them as they ran. Hockslock and the three troops he had with him opened fire as well, Hockslock pointing after them, ordering his boys forward.

They'd hardly cleared the ruined storefront they were in when a grenade went off at their feet – riot foam. Hockslock was able to look

By Steicy Jourdan

By Marcel Popik

up and see another Enforcer disengage his cloaking field, fire off a single round into one of his boy's head, and then jet away down the street. Hockslock yelled at Btoomba to look out, but Btoomba couldn't hear him over his own gunfire, and the Enforcer was able to come up behind him unseen and slash at some exposed cables with his wristblade. He didn't stop to press the advantage, following his companions away down the street – Btoomba's ammo feed jammed or something, because the Ripper Suit's guns were suddenly silent, and the suit's legs started twitching spasmodically.

This was easily the most embarrassing day of Hockslock's life.

"Boss, it's Grushnak," Hockslock heard on the comm. "It's a frajing mess here. My squad is dead. The loot is slag. I think they must've used Hurlukka's fuel tank and modified one of the missiles into a makeshift bomb. Orders?"

Hockslock sighed. He knew that Grushnak was never going to let him live this one down.

"Find Rudy and patch him up. Get me and the men out of this crap. If there are Enforcers here, they must be after the ledger as well. We find it, we find them, and then we frajing kill them."▪

Painting the Plague Faction in a few simple steps

By Matt Gilbert

This month, rather than paint up a display piece, I thought I'd demonstrate how to quickly get a Deadzone faction painted up to gaming (or "tabletop") standard in a few simple steps. The techniques used here are fairly well known – the textures on the models are all going to be picked out using inks and drydrushing only. No careful blending or meticulous free-hand work in sight! You'll see the slightly rough finish that drybrushing results in in the finished pictures at the end.

I'll start with the Stage 3 Plague models. Some of you may have seen these pictures before; indeed, I put them up on my blog on the Mantic forums a couple of months back. For this article I re-present them and then also move on to the dogs, first and second generation Plague. All bases were sanded prior to painting and all models were sprayed with white undercoat.

To start with, I mixed up a batch of mid-light pink very simply with red and white (with a little GW Tallarn flesh in there too but you can skip this easily if you do not have any). You only need a little bit of red mixed in so be careful – it's easy to make it too dark. Once this was applied to the skin and dry, I drybrushed a couple of increasingly lighter shades of pink on top.

Once the skin was dry, I washed it all with thinned army painter red ink wash.

The skin was finally drybrushed lightly again with very pale pink (off-white). Next I picked some basic flat colours and blocked in the clothing, hair and weapons.

The bases were then painted a mid-grey and some road markings added to a couple.

Next I used different washes on the different areas, targeting inks to appropriate areas (e.g. blue ink on the blue clothing). I was going to stop there but I decided to do a few highlights to help the models stand out a bit more – this was done with a colour slightly lighter than the original flat base colour but not done extensively anywhere, just on extreme edges really. The bases had a thin dark tone ink applied and were then drybrushed gently with a light grey. Finally, things like eyes and teeth were painted (you can easily skip small details like this for gaming-standard models although on a small number of models like a Strike Team, adding

these final flourishes can make a big difference).

For the Plague hounds, I used exactly the same technique on the skin as I did on the Stage 3's above. The only difference here was that it covered pretty much the entire model! Really quick to paint and both models were done in no time at all. I think waiting for ink to dry took longer than anything else!

For the Stage 2s I started with a much darker pink in the fleshy areas. For the Stage 1 I went very red. The Stage 2 models then had a thinned red wash with a touch of blue ink in it and the Stage 1 a red ink/dark tone ink mix applied. For the Stage 1 I was happy with the result but once the ink was dry, I lightly drybrushed the flesh on the Stage 2s again with a pale pink to help pick out the muscle fibres.

For both Stage 1 and 2 models, the bony plates were done the same way: pure white to start with, a wash with army painter soft tone ink and then pure white highlights on top. These white highlights were applied to all the plate edges and the tops of all spikes.
Once the models were all done they were sprayed with matte varnish. Finally, I tried out the GW technical paint "Blood for the Blood God" to see what it was like. I did this last or the matte varnish would have dulled the gloss finish on the blood, spoiling the effect. I applied it in several layers, letting it go a bit sticky but not drying completely before applying the next. I may have got a little carried away but I think it works in principal. I've seen much better blood and gore effects on models but for a quick, no-complications effort, this stuff seems to work. Good enough for "gaming standard" models anyway.

The Enforcers in the following pictures are also a quick-to-table scheme. I'll revisit these in another issue.▪

357

By John Hoyland

I
Shadows
Trinity
Swagger

It is night. More than this, it is that darkest part of night that has gathered many names to itself over the centuries. *Dead of night, the witching hour, the wee small hours*.

For the man standing in the shadows it is the *graveyard shift* and it is his time.

Humankind has always been scared of the dark. It's a primeval thing, a base-level instinct thing. It's the knowledge that the dark belongs to other creatures, other beings, more suited to its *mien* than the human has evolved to be. Humans are more on edge at night; they jump at noises, see shapes in shadows. Fear grows in their minds. The fight-or-flight response kicks in easily.

Over the centuries, humans have developed ways, technological as much as anything, of dealing with their lack of ownership of the night. The Marines of the Galactic Co-Prosperity Sphere, for example, have a wide array of gear available to them to turn night from enemy to ally. The humble rifleman has low-light goggles and an Im-Vis bio-scanner

By Ian Powell

available to him on a personal level, but this is backed up by a dazzling array of scanners, sensors and other systems at battalion and battlegroup – and orbital fleet support – levels.

The man standing in the shadows has none of these things about him, at least not in a way that a rifleman of the Corporation would recognise them. Perhaps an Enforcer would be familiar with some of the gear available to the man in the shadows, but it would be in a limited way, the way a Stone Age man from Old Earth would recognise that a riot policeman's shock-maul is a weapon to bludgeon an enemy with.

By Grant Mahoney

The man in the shadows is invisible. Not in a ghost story way; he's not incorporeal. Nor in a fantasy story way; he's not hiding beneath some sort of cloak of invisibility. Look at him and you'll see him, sure enough. But no Immediate Vicinity bio-scanner – not even the high-spec stuff used by insertion teams or Enforcer strike teams – will light him up. Neither night-vision lens nor infrared equipment will pick him out of the darkness around him. The best trained sniffer hound might – *might* – get a hint of him, if the hound is having a particularly good day and the man in the shadows is having an off day.

The man in the shadows had an off day once. It was three years, seven months and twenty-two days ago.

No, you will not be aware of the man in the shadows. He, on the other hand, will be exactly and precisely aware of your location. He will be able to see you, to hear you, to smell you and, if he's here to kill you, he will be able to kill you.

Fortunately, the man in the shadows is not often sent to kill. This is a relief to him because, whilst he is very good at killing when he is called upon to do it, he finds it a rather distasteful thing to have to do.

The man in the shadows watches the empty goods yard in front of him. Slick, oily rain is hosing from the sky, dousing everything to its core and scattering gems of orange light around the yard; dancing reflections from the heavy night-lights that hang on great chains from the yard's gantries.

The man in the shadows waits.

He is aware of three others. They have been there since before he arrived. They're carrying military-grade rifles that have seen better days and they're watching the goods yard from elevated positions. They're there to provide cover to the ones who will arrive next. For gangers from the OutRing habitation zone, they're not bad at stealth. Not proficient, the man in the shadows considers, certainly not to the level that would be expected of the recon elements of the Corporation's armed forces, but used to operating quietly and at night and therefore good enough to be of use to their fellow gangers.

The rest of the gang arrive. The man in the shadows heard their autos pulling up three minutes ago. They've made their way through the warehouses and office prefabs that surround the goods yard and now they're here.

By Matt Gilbert

They're armed to the teeth, mostly with older pattern AzFeq semi-autos and handguns from the Trans-Praal workshops. Decent kit. The man in the shadows has always considered the TP-17 to be one of the finest laser pistols manufactured anywhere in the Co-Prosperity Sphere.

The gangers fan out into a crescent facing the chain-link gates into the goods yard. The man in the shadows can smell the tension coming off them; they're ready for the meet to go horribly wrong. Some of them, he thinks, are *itching* for it to go wrong.

Everyone waits.

The man in the shadows hears three inaudible scuffs of noise in the space of two seconds. He jerks his head and looks to where one of the three covering gangers is secreted. He blinks twice, then half-closes his left eye for a moment. He does the same at the second man's position, then the third.

Interesting.

The man in the shadows looks to the goods yard's gates. For a moment all is still, bar the slashing rain and the dancing lights.

Then a fire-team inserts itself into the goods yard. It is a slick manoeuvre, rehearsed over and over and performed in as textbook a manner as any officer in any army anywhere could wish.

The gangers react to the fire-team by bringing weapons to bear. Energy cells hum from safe to active and trigger fingers begin to itch. The tension-musk coming off the gangers ramps up a notch.

From behind the fire-team a man strides into the goods yard. His swagger is as confident as can be. His weapon remains very deliberately holstered. He halts, and lets the silence of the goods yard settle around him.

The man in the shadows can't help but raise an eyebrow, albeit only ever so slightly, as he realises the identity of the swaggering man. It is as close as the man in the shadows gets to revealing how surprising the swaggering man's presence here is. Given the swaggering man's identity, though, the presence of a highly professional fire-team becomes entirely unsurprising.

The man in the shadows blinks at the swaggering man, twitches both eyes, then blinks a couple more times. Images are captured and filed, though not yet transmitted. He clenches his jaw in a couple of significant places. Audio-capture begins.

After a pause so pregnant with tension that it seems someone's trigger finger *must* twitch, Swaggering man speaks.

"Come on Targuth! Let's do this."

Yes, Targuth, thinks the man in the shadows, *you should get on and do this.*

Targuth steps forward. He's a brute; easily the biggest man in the goods yard. Dreadlocks radiate from his head and his beard is forked in two. He's holding an AzFeq mk.II assault rifle casually in one paw and a massive two-handed fire-axe is balanced on

By Paul Scott

his shoulder.

By "Daedle"

"Who ye comin' here usin' me true name?" he demands, his voice a rumble of thunder to accompany the rain. "Me has the gods on me side so make ye words polite."

"The gods?" asks Swaggering man, and the man in the shadows can hear the smile in his voice. "A trinity of them? Up on high? No. No you don't. They've deserted you. I've set my own gods up there to watch over us instead. And my gods are better than your gods."

Targuth growls and shakes his head, scattering rainwater from his dreads. The sight of it is like seeing some sort of feline alpha male shake out its mane. Targuth turns to one of his gangers and hollers something at him in guttural gang speak. The ganger speaks into a two-way radio then shakes his head. Targuth turns angrily back to Swaggering man.

"Ye come here, kill me blood? This a speakin' of make-peace and ye makin' war! Ye can have war, if it war ye seek!"

Swaggering man shakes his head. "You don't want that," he says. "If this escalates, I can guarantee – *guarantee* – that not one of your boys will live and not one of my boys will die. But don't worry! Your gods- huh, your *boys* aren't dead. They're just sleeping a little. They'll have sore heads for a day or two, and it might be a week before they can remember what happened, but they're not dead. So, let's talk peace. And let's talk pharmaceuticals."

II
Of Names and Numbers
Dirt

"You're absolutely, on-your-mother's-virgin-honour, dead-as-a-frikkin'-doornail certain? I mean you're *certain* certain it was him? Certain?"

The man in the shadows –

– No. He's not in the shadows any more. He needs a name, a handle. Only he doesn't currently have one. He was given a name at birth, as is the norm, and for the first twelve years of his life it served him admirably, but when he caught the eye of the Office and became an agent thereof, that name ceased to apply to him. Since beginning work for the Office he has had a number of names, but

By Grant Mahoney

his current assignment doesn't warrant the use of one and so he doesn't have one. He is currently – and it should be stressed that this is only true for the duration of this operation – he is currently Agent 357. The number has absolutely no significance; he was not known as Agent 357 prior to this operation and he will, in all probability, never be known as Agent 357 again after its completion. It is an entirely randomly generated number. When Agent 357 is debriefed after this operation and assigned to a new one, there will be no record anywhere to link his new name or number to the number to which he is currently assigned.

Agent 357 nods in answer to his handler's question. Or rather, questions. Or rather, the same question asked three times.

"Of course you're certain," says his handler. "Of course you are. Crap. Crappety crap-crap -crap." Agent 357's handler raises his styrene coffee cup to his lips, realises he's jittering too much to take a swig right now, and places the cup back on the table.

By contrast, Agent 357 sips his coffee calmly.

"Okay," says his handler. "Okay. Er…" He sighs, shakes his head. "Crap. Okay. Thanks. Right. Thanks, good, uh, you did good. Successful mission, all, uh, all objectives fulfilled. Uh. Get, get some rest. I'll take this back to the Office and, uh, crap, someone will be in touch. Usual drill. You know how it works."

Agent 357 nods, sips the last of his coffee, stands, turns, and leaves the coffee house.

"Crap," mutters Agent 357's handler, rolling his eyes at the ceiling. "A dirty Chief of Staff. Why do *I* have to get the dirty Chief of Staff?"

III

By Steicy Jourdan

A Long Shot
Pretty Serious Allegations

Sector Chief of Staff Victor Olborro is old blood. His family line goes all the way back. Some of the first to settle off-world. Some of the first to leave Old Earth behind and start a new life. Olborro's ancestors were frontiersmen in a sense that humankind had never known before.

Admittedly, they were frontiersmen with palaces and private armies, which seemed to go somewhat against the spirit of the pioneers Olborro had read about in histories of pre-Settlement, when humankind was still bound to Old Earth, but the Olborro line is one that traces itself back to the early days of the frontier, and that is what counts in Olborro's book.

Victor Olborro is a tall man with broad, powerful shoulders and a stomach turning from muscular to flabby, but he bears himself well. When he walks, he walks with a swagger. Millions of Marines are his to command – armies vastly bigger than anything his frontiersman ancestors could have imagined – but he feels no pressure at this, only pride in his place, in his achievements. He has his secrets – of course he does; what man doesn't? – but they're buried so deep even the Council of Seven would struggle to unearth them. He also feels no compunction whatsoever that he has hung several friends out to dry in order to keep those secrets buried. He feels the occasional tinge of sadness that his brother-in-law was executed by spacing for trafficking pharms, but more because spacing is a dishonourable way to go than

because an innocent man died. Spacing is for common criminals, not for the highborn.

Victor Olborro is currently lying on his belly in dense undergrowth, a Long cradled in his hands. It's been near two decades since he served with a recon platoon and picked up the habit of referring to a sniper rifle simply as a 'Long,' but it's a reference that's never left him.

He's hunting now, putting all those sniper-skills to good use, but his quarry is big game, not an enemy fighter. He has a kylosaurid in his sights, centred, and conditions are perfect for the shot, but he's not taking it yet. He wants it to move away; just about four more metres, and then he'll take the shot. The reason is pure vanity; four more metres and the shot will be a personal record distance and, therefore, an Officers' Club record too. It will win him a small but significant amount of money.

The kylosaurid's head comes up; it's got a scent. Prey of its own to track. It swings its head from side to side, flaring its ultra-sensitive nostrils as it does so.

Olborro loves hunting kylosaurid. They're such damned sophisticated predators that, if you make even the tiniest error when tracking one, chances are high you'll suddenly find that you're the prey. And you'd better make damned sure your first shot is a kill shot.

Olborro's kylosaurid has homed in on its prey; in a moment will come a sudden burst of speed as the creature sprints into the forest. Then, very likely, some lumbering herd beast will die.

It looks like the angle of the beast's run will take it away from Olborro, which will give him the extra distance he needs to win the bet, but it will also make the shot so much harder; a kylosaurid's acceleration from a standing start is phenomenal.

By Paul Scott

Olborro allows himself a smile; the distance and the speed will only add to the kill's prestige.

The kylosaurid moves. There's a tell that Olborro knows to watch for, just before it happens; a shivering of leg muscles as they bunch in preparation.

The shiver comes, the kylosaurid springs from a standing start to a run and Olborro fires.

The shot is perfect. The jagged pulse of laser energy pierces the kylosaurid's skull just above and behind its right eye. The bone there is thinner and the shot splinters it and slices through the brain, instantly severing the brains' commands to limbs. The kylosaurid crashes to the ground with a thump that Olborro can feel, even from this distance. It's a quick, clean kill, an honourable end for the beast.

Olborro checks that the targeting computer on his Long has recorded the details of the shot, then mutters, "Shame there's no good eating on a kylosaurid."

Then he rolls suddenly to his back, sidearm leaping from its holster, and centres the sights on the man standing over him.

"Getting better, Kul," he says. "Nearly had me."

Kul, who flinched when his commander turned his pistol on him, recovers his composure quickly enough and holds out a palmbook to the Sector Chief of Staff.

By Pete Kijek

"A fine shot, sir," he says as Olborro holsters his weapon and takes the palmbook. "Very fine."

Olborro sits up and flicks a finger across the palmbook to light it up. The screen that greets him is security encrypted but there aren't many clearance levels denied to a Sector Chief. He scans the information that presents itself upon retinal identification.

"Pretty serious allegations," he says.

"Indeed so, sir," agrees Kul.

Olborro rises smoothly to his feet. "I'd best question him myself."

By Grant Mahoney

IV
Accusations
A Loss of Honour

The room is as sound-sealed as a room can be. Nothing can possibly get in or out, unless comms are activated. Even then, if they're not officially sanctioned comms, the periodic sensor sweeps will pick them up and raise the alarm.

It's also as bland as these rooms always are. Dull metallic walls, a dull metallic table, a pair of dull metallic chairs and one wall taken up by a one-way mirror. Victor Olborro sits in one of the dull metallic chairs and Colonel Stephan Holst sits in the other. Holst bears himself well, but there's fear around the eyes. He knows where this conversation is going to go.

"It all looks as cut-and-dried as it could be, Colonel," says Olborro. "There's no point you trying to wriggle out of it, it would demean us both for you to deny your crimes. So just tell me why. And tell me who else I should space."

Holst's eyes twitch at the mention of spacing. "If I am to be executed, let it be as an officer," he says.

"You're not denying it then?" Olborro asks, flicking one eyebrow slightly.

"As you said, sir, there would be no point. Whoever has set me up has done it so well that – your words – there's no way I can wriggle out of it."

"Set you up? That's quite an allegation."

"Sir, with all due respect, I don't want to play this game. Yes, I have been set up, no, I don't know who did it and yes, I realise I'm a dead man. So please, can we just get on with it? Only, I repeat my request that my execution be by firing squad, not by spacing. I have never stained the honour of my rank, I would ask you to preserve that honour in the manner of my execution."

Olborro sits back in his chair and folds his arms across his chest.

"Suspend vocal recording," he says to the air.

++Identification required++ announces an automated voice, issuing from unseen speakers in the walls.

"Identification: Victor Olborro, Sector Chief," says Olborro, his tone bored.

++Verified++ says the automated voice. ++Vocal recording suspended. Time marked++

"The man Targuth. Your supplier. Tell me how we get to him and I'll see that your death is honourable," he tells Holst.

"I never met the man," says Holst. "I didn't even know such an individual existed until I read the dossier your people had me read."

Olborro shrugs with his eyes. "You don't help me, I can't help you," he says.

Holst grits his teeth. He's afraid, and fear isn't a feeling he's used to. "Then so help me you'll have to space me," he says, "Because I swear, on my mother's life, on my *own* life, for all that's worth now, that I have absolutely no idea who this *Targuth* is, nor have I been in any way involved in any form of drugs trafficking either recently or at any point in my life."

Olborro smiles, though it is an empty smile. "If I had only your word as an officer – and one I trust and value at that – I would believe you. Truly I would, but…" he taps the dossier on the table. "…I can't deny this."

"As I said, *Sir*," The word has an edge to it. An edge that suggests Holst no longer means it as an honorific, "I don't want to play this game. Your decision has clearly been made. Carry out the sentence."

For the briefest moment Olborro looks irritated. "Very well." He sits forward in his chair now and orders the vocal recording to resume.

++Vocal recording resumed. Time marked++ says the voice.

"Colonel Stephan Holst," says Olborro, his tone official now, no trace of comradeship lacing it. "You are to be tried for drugs trafficking, individual charges to be laid out clearly at such time as your trial commences. Should you found guilty – and such an outcome seems inevitable – you will be taken from this place into orbit via interplanetary shuttle and from said shuttle

By "Daedle"

By Chris Schlumpberger

you will be executed by spacing. Before sentence is carried out, you will be stripped of rank and title and your military pension will be denied your family. Interview ends."

V
Judgement

Agent 357 hears every word of the interview, sensor sweeps or no. He hears every word of the trial too.

And then he receives his orders. They are distasteful to him; he doesn't like being an agent of death.

But Victor Olborro will die and it will be by his hand.

To Be Continued▪

By Chris Schlumpberger

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